

I Claim:

- 1 1. A method for enabling players to gamble directly with one another, comprising the steps  
2 of:  
3 a) for each player, receiving at a host server a bet conveyed from a machine  
4 connected to the host server through a distributed network;  
5 b) combining the received bets from a set of players into a pot;  
6 c) commencing a hosted game among the set of players by prompting the players at  
7 their respective machines for inputs;  
8 d) receiving the inputs at the host server;  
9 e) selecting at least one winner of the hosted game from among the set of players  
10 based on the received inputs; and  
11 f) allocating the pot of the hosted game to the at least one winner in accordance with  
12 prescribed rules.

- 1 2. The method as in claim 1, wherein there is one winner and wherein the allocating step  
2 comprises crediting said one winner with the pot.

- 1 3. The method as in claim 2, including the additional step, prior to the allocating step, of  
2 deducting a commission from the pot.

- 1 4. The method as in claim 1, wherein each bet received at the host server comprises an  
2 authorization to charge or credit a designated account of a respective player.
- 1 5. The method as in claim 1, wherein each of the players in the set of players has agreed to  
2 bet the same amount of money to participate in the hosted game.
- 1 6. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of notifying the set of players in  
2 the hosted game of the at least one winner.
- 3 7. The method as in claim 6, wherein each bet received at the host server comprises an  
4 authorization to charge or credit a designated account of a respective player, and wherein  
5 the notifying step further includes notifying each player of any charges or credits to a  
6 respective designated account.
- 1 8. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step, after the allocating step, of  
2 prompting each player to play again against the other players in the set of players.
- 1 9. The method as in claim 8, including the additional steps of repeating steps (a) through (f).
- 1 10. The method as in claim 1, wherein the hosted game is a pick-a-number game and wherein  
2 the inputs received at the host server is at least one number from each player.

1 11. The method as in claim 10, including the additional step of generating a random or  
2 pseudorandom number at the host server, and wherein the selecting step comprises:  
3 comparing the numbers provided by each player to number generated at the host  
4 server for a match, and  
5 selecting as the at least one winner any player who input a matching number.

1 12. The method as in claim 11, wherein, in the event that two or more players input a  
2 matching number, steps (c) through (e) are repeated for each player that input the  
3 matching number prior to the allocating step.

4 13. The method as in claim 10, including the additional step of generating a random or  
5 pseudorandom number at the host server, and wherein the selecting step comprises:  
6 calculating a difference between the number provided by each player and the  
7 number generated at the host server, and  
8 selecting as the at least one winner the player whose calculated difference is a  
9 minimum.

1 14. The method as in claim 13, wherein the selected step excludes any player in the set of  
2 players that provided a number which is greater than the number generated by the host  
3 server.

- 1 15. The method as in claim 13, wherein the selecting step excludes any player in the set of  
2 players that provided a number which is less than the number generated by the host  
3 server.
- 1 16. The method as in claim 13, wherein a prescribed number of additional winners are  
2 selected in order of increasing calculated differences from said minimum calculated  
3 difference.
- 1 17. The method as in claim 1, wherein each player has a respective a list of buddies  
associated therewith, and wherein each player is apprized as to which, if any, of his or her  
associated buddies are presently connected to the host server.
- 1 18. The method as in claim 17, wherein one player can challenge a buddy from his or her  
buddy list to participate in the hosted game by having an electronic message conveyed to  
that buddy.
- 1 19. The method as in claim 18, wherein the electronic message is an instant message  
conveyed from said one player's machine to the machine of the challenged buddy.
- 1 20. The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of rating each player by skill level  
and wherein each of the players in the set of players differs in skill level by at most a  
prescribed amount.

1 21. The method as in claim 20, wherein each of the players in the set of players has the same  
2 skill level.

1 22. The method as in claim 20, wherein the rating step comprises utilizing information in a  
2 database concerning at least each player's prior performance in one or more hosted  
3 games.

1 23. The method as in claim 20, wherein the rating step comprises posting a series of  
2 questions to each player and gauging the correctness of the responses provided by each  
3 player.

1 24. The method as in claim 1, including the additional steps of:  
2 permitting multiple potential players to chat in a chat room made available by the  
3 host server, and  
4 enabling the potential players to select a hosted game in which to participate  
5 together,  
6 whereby the players choose the members of the set of players for the hosted game.

1 25. The method as in claim 1, wherein the host server conveys to each player's machine a  
2 personal Web page which includes statistics concerning that player's performance.

1 26. A method for enabling teams of players to compete directly against each other for money,  
2 comprising the steps of:

- 3 a) establishing at least a first team and a second team, the teams including non-  
4 overlapping sets of players each of which is connected by a machine to a host  
5 server through a distributed network;
- 6 b) receiving at the host server an ante conveyed from each player's machine;
- 7 b) combining the antes from all of the players into a pot;
- 8 c) commencing a hosted game among the teams by prompting the players of each  
9 team at their respective machines for inputs;
- 10 d) receiving the inputs at the host server;
- 11 e) selecting at least one winning team from among the teams based on the received  
12 inputs; and
- 13 f) allocating the pot of the hosted game to the at least one winning team in  
14 accordance with prescribed rules.

1 27. The method as in claim 26, wherein the first input received from a player on a given team  
2 in response to a particular prompt is registered at the host server and wherein the selecting  
3 step is based upon the registered inputs.